

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PING EG
SUBJECT: AL AHRAR DISAPPEARS FROM THE STANDS

SUMMARY: WEEKLY AL AHRAR, MOUTHPIECE OF OFFICIAL RIGHT WING PARTY, DID NOT APPEAR ON NEWSSTANDS LAST WEEK OF AUGUST. OFFICIAL EXPLANATION IS THAT PAPER HAS BEEN UNABLE TO MEET ITS FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS. THERE IS SOME TRUTH TO THIS--LACK OF GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SECTOR ADVERTISING HAS HURT--BUT IT IS NOT THE WHOLE STORY. PAPER HAS OFFENDED EGYPT'S POLITICAL LEADERS. END SUMMARY.

1. SPEAKING TO EMBOFF AUGUST 31, PARTY LEADER MUSTAFA KAMAL MURAD SAID HE WAS PRESENTED WITH 12,000 POUND BILL AT 10 P.M. AUGUST 27, THE NIGHT BEFORE PUBLICATION. PRINTER (AL AKHBAR'S MOUSSA SABRI) DEMANDED THAT THIS BE PAID EITHER IN CASH OR BY CERTIFIED CHECK. WHEN MURAD PROTESTED THAT THIS WAS PATENTLY IMPOSSIBLY, SABRI REFERRED HIM TO "HIGHER AUTHORITIES."

2. "HIGHER AUTHORITIES" INDICATED TO MURAD THAT HIS
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PARTY'S PUBLICATION WAS BEING SUPPRESSED BECAUSE OF OFFENSIVE ARTICLES. PAPER'S DEFENSE OF MUSTAFA AMIN AND EXPOSE OF COSTS SURROUNDING SADAT'S NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY CONGRESS IN ALEXANDRIA WERE SPECIFICALLY CITED. ADDITIONALLY, MURAD SAID PRIME MINISTER SALEM WAS OUTRAGED BY AL AHRAR'S REVELATION THAT HE HAD RESIGNED (CLAIM THAT WAS SCHEDULED TO BE REPEATED IN SUPPRESSED

EDITION). MURAD WAS TOLD THAT, IF HE CAME UP WITH REQUIRED 12,000 POUNDS, PAPER WOULD BE CONFISCATED JUDICIALLY.

3. MURAD APPEALED TO SADAT (APPARENTLY LATE SAME EVENING) WITHOUT SUCCESS. PRESIDENT TOLD MURAD AL AHRAR HAD BECOME "TOO POINTED" AND IT WOULD BE BEST IF PAPER WERE NOT PUBLISHED "UNTIL PRESIDENT RETURNED FROM CAMP DAVID."

4. MURAD SUSPECTS THAT SOME OF SADAT'S ADVISERS--HE IDENTIFIED SALEM--HAVE SUGGESTED TO THE PRESIDENT THAT IT WOULD BE WISE TO BAN ALL OPPOSITION PAPERS UNTIL OUTCOME OF CAMP DAVID IS CLEAR. MURAD REJECTS THIS, POINTING OUT HE ACCOMPANIED SADAT TO JERUSALEM AND HAS CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED PRESIDENT'S PEACE INITIATIVE (ALTHOUGH, PRIVATELY, MURAD NOW DOUBTS INITIATIVE WILL PROVE SUCCESSFUL). MURAD SAID HE WILL PURSUE THIS LINE WITH SADAT AT SCHEDULED MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 2, IN ISMAILIA, BUT DOUBTS IT WILL BE SUCCESSFUL. HE APPEARED RESIGNED TO FACT THAT HIS WEEKLY WILL MISS ITS NEXT FEW PUBLICATION DATES.

5. MURAD THOUGHT THIS EPISODE NOT IMPORTANT ITSELF, BUT SYMPTOMATIC OF DIFFICULTY SADAT CONFRONTS IN ATTEMPTING TO FOSTER MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY. HE CLAIMED MOST OF SADAT'S CLOSEST ADVISERS DO NOT BELIEVE IN THIS SYSTEM AND ARE ATTEMPTING TO RETURN EGYPT TO A ONE PARTY STATE. THE PRESIDENT, ACCORDING TO MURAD, IS CONSTANTLY BEING

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FED BAD ADVICE.

6. COMMENT: DISAPPEARANCE OF AL AHRAR, FOLLOWING REPEATED CONFISCATION OF LEFTIST AL AHALI (SEIZED FOR THE 11TH TIME AUGUST 30) FURTHER TARNISHES SADAT'S RELIBERALIZATION CAMPAIGN. ADDED TO BANNING OF MUSTAFA AMIN AND OTHER GOVERNMENT CRITICS, TEMPORARY DISAPPEARANCE OF AL AHRAR CAN NOT BUT HAVE CHILLING EFFECT ON JOURNALISTIC FREEDOM. MATTHEWS

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